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ABSTRACT

The theoretical perspective of Sullivan proposes that during preadolescence, a "chum" relationship increases a child's sense of self-worth. Subjects were 60 male sixth graders, with an equal number in the chumship and non-chumship groups. Self-concept was measured with the Piers-Harris Children's Self-Concept Scale. The results show that children involved in a chum relationship possessed significantly higher self-concepts than those without a chum. This finding is explained in terms of Sullivan's notion that a chum relationship provides the opportunity for the preadolescent to realize that he shares common thoughts and feelings with his friend, therein validating his own sense of self-worth. (Author)

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Friendship Patterns and Self-Concept Development in Pre-Adolescent Males

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Harry Stack Sullivan's developmental theory (7) is infrequently cited in contemporary journals and textbooks on child development. Nonetheless, his theory is one of the few that extensively addresses itself to the growth of the self during childhood. In this regard, Sullivan's ideas were heavily weighted in the social area. He suggested that as the "self dynamism" evolves, it largely resembles evaluations made of the child by significant others in his life. Sullivan proposed the term "reflected appraisal" to describe this self-developing process.

Early in development, the child's social interactions with his parents primarily contribute to his evolving sense of self. During preadolescence, Sullivan proposed that a new type of interest appears in which a member of the same sex becomes a "chum" or close friend. This relationship is critical to the growth of the preadolescent's self-worth. According to Sullivan, the intimacy and mutuality of a chumship enhance the honest and open exchange of personal thoughts and information such that the preadolescent realizes that his ideas are similar to those of another human being. This process is referred to as consensual validation of the self. Hence, a youngster's feelings of self-worth increase as he perceives the chum as having attitudes, interests, and feelings similar to his own. Conversely, a preadolescent without a close friend does not have the opportunity to communicate intimately with a peer and his ideational symbols are not validated. He will accordingly possess a lower self-esteem than one who has formed a chumship.

Based upon Sullivan's theoretical notions, then, the following hypothesis was tested in this study:

> Preadolescents involved in a chum relationship will have a higher self-concept than those without a chum.

METHODOLOGY

SUBJECTS

This study was part of a larger project undertaken by the author (5). The subject population was selected from the sixth grade of an elementary school in a white, upper middle-class suburban area. Ninety-two boys from five classes participated in the first part of the investigation. From this sample, 60 boys were eventually chosen as subjects for the two experimental groups.

VARIABLES CONTROLLED

Since all of the subjects were chosen from the same school, a fair amount of homogeneity with respect to social class was assumed. Accordingly, this variable was not experimentally controlled. Intelligence level was controlled, however. The procedure used was to take the most recent IQ score that the student had on his scholastic records. In every case, testing had occurred within ten months of the time of this study.

The other variable controlled was level of social acceptance. A sociometric questionnaire was used for this purpose. Each child was asked to name three children from his class he would most like to play with after school, go to another classroom with, and participate with in a group project. Nominations were limited to males. The number of nominations a child received was his raw score of social acceptance. (Measures of skewness for the five class distributions indicated that they fairly closely matched normal curves. Thus, transformations did not seem warranted.) Z scores were then computed, with a mean of five and standard deviation of one, in order to correct for variations in class size. The scores thus reflected deviation from class means in units of standard deviations rather than absolute number of votes. The

use of five as the mean rather than zero eliminated negative scores and simplified computation.

CRITERIA OF CHUMSHIP

Three means of evaluating this factor were utilized. First, a measure of friendship stability (4,8) was employed in which subjects were requested to name their three best friends. Selections were limited to fellow classmates, other children in the school, or children living in their neighborhood. Two weeks later the same children were asked to name their three best friends in order of preference. Only those children whose best friend from the initial measure remained as first or second best friend were considered to have a stable friendship and qualified for inclusion in the chumship group.

The second criterion involved the Chumship Check List (See Table 1). This checklist was designed by the author, in keeping with Sullivan's notions of a chumship, to evaluate whether or not the preadolescent communicates honestly and openly with his friend and is sensitive to his needs and interests. A pilot study indicated that the checklist's internal consistency (Kuder-Richardson Formula 20) is on the order of 0.85 and this was considered sufficient to warrant its use in the main part of the investigation. Only those subjects who checked at least ten of the 17 items were considered to exhibit a chum relationship.

------INSERT TABLE 1------

The final criterion was based upon the child's preference with regard to spare time. Each subject was asked whether he would rather spend his free time with his best friend or group of friends. This preference technique was adopted from Devereux (3). Subjects who indicated a preference for spending free time with their best friend satisfactorily met this criterion of a chumship.

In total, 30 of the original 92 subjects qualified for the chumship group by meeting all three criteria. A second group of 30 subjects were then selected who did not have this personal friendship as determined by not meeting at least one of the three criteria. This group was chosen such that its members were equal to those in the chumship group with respect to level of social acceptance and intelligence.

SELF CONCEPT

Self-concept was measured by the Piers-Harris Children's Self-Concept Scale (6). This instrument consists of 80 first person declarative statements of the type "I am a happy person" to which the child responds "yes" or "no". About half of the statements are worded to indicate a negative self-concept while the other half indicate positive self-perceptions. Items are keyed such that the higher one's total score, the higher one's self-concept. This scale was selected over similar measures because of its low correlation with social desirability and high levels of reliability and validity reported in the test manual. Its administration took place on a group basis, with the experimenter first talking to the boys about the value of finding how they really feel about themselves and the necessity, therefore, for a completely honest response rather than a socially desirable one. It was stressed that the scale is not a test, that there are no right or wrong answers, and that the results would be kept confidential.

RESULTS

Intelligence level was adequately controlled as the Mean IQ in the chumship group was 121.6 while in the non-chumship group, it was 120.3. Both groups were also well equated on social acceptance as the respective means in units of standard deviation were 5.04 and 5.042.

------INSERT TABLE 2------

Table 2 presents the results obtained with the Children's Self-Concept Scale. The mean score for the chumship group was 61.1 while the mean for the non-chumship group was 53.3. A one-way ANOVA performed on the data, summarized in Table 3, produced an F (1,58) of 9.70, significant at the .01 level. Consequently, the experimental hypothesis was supported by the data; preadolescent males involved in a chum relationship had significantly higher self-concepts than those not involved in a chumship.

------INSERT TABLE 3------

DISCUSSION

That preadolescent males involved in a chumship had higher self-concepts than those without a chum is evidence in support of one aspect of Sullivan's developmental theory. This finding can be placed in proper perspective if one compares the mean scores of the two experimental groups on the Children's Self-Concept Scale to the norms reported by Piers and Harris (6). Such a comparison reveals that whereas the non-chumship group fell at approximately the fiftieth percentile, the chumship group was at the seventy-first percentile. Hence, the difference between the two groups with respect to self-concept was the result of the elevated scores of the preadolescent males in the chumship group.

Thus, as Sullivan theorized, a chum relationship can enhance the self-worth of the preadolescent. As two youngsters communicate openly, the preadolescent realizes that he shares certain ideas and feelings with his chum and begins, perhaps for the first time in his life, to appreciate the common humanity of people. No longer perceiving his own thoughts as entirely unique or idiosyncratic, he can resolve some of the uncertainty with respect to his

personality. As noted earlier, Sullivan labeled this process consenusal validation of the self.

Sullivan's explanation seems plausible, especially in light of some research concerning the bases upon which preadolescents choose their friends. Both Austin and Thompson (1) and Byrne and Griffitt (2) reported that similar attitudes, interests, and tastes were important reasons given for selecting best friends during this period. In relation to Sullivan's theory, selecting best friends for these reasons would enhance the process of consensual validation. As the preadolescent interacts closely with individuals who can reinforce his own attitudes and ideas, his feelings of self-worth increase because he becomes aware that he shares certain qualities common to other human beings.

A couple of issues with regard to the experimental design employed in this study are worth discussing. First, the examination of friendship patterns was not intensive as at no time was the interaction of a preadolescent and his best friend specifically observed. It would appear that a closer analysis of such friendships could be made in a camp, recreation center, or similar setting in which the investigator would have ample opportunity to observe the changing nature of these relationships and decide whether in fact, they constitute what Sullivan labeled an intimate chumship.

Also, this study was not designed to tease apart the direction of causality. Although it was hypothesized that a chum relationship contributes to a positive self-concept, the causal pattern could well be reversed. Thus, the causality issue remains unresolved in a correlational study of this nature in which two sets of data are collected at only one point in time.

Nonetheless, the findings reported here have certain implications for the general area of developmental psychology. Perhaps partly as a result of the influence of psychoanalytic theory, few writers have devoted much attention

to the preadolescent era. It is often considered to be a period of relative calm with the child expanding his skills and knowledge as well as consolidating his sexual identity. Although dramatic personality changes may not characterize this period, it is possible that by looking ahead to adolescence, many theorists have neglected significant developmental events. Certainly, the results of this investigation suggest the potential role of friends in the socialization process of this era.

A second implication for developmentalists concerns the contributions of Sullivan to developmental psychology. His contributions are rarely mentioned in the writings of professionals concerned with child development. Perhaps some see his major work as coming in the clinical area and have overlooked his developmental theorizing. Or, maybe his theory is perceived as merely an extension or elaboration of Freud's ideas and it accordingly has not been evaluated on its own merits. In light of the dearth of theorizing in the area of childhood social relations, Sullivan's social-development theory certainly warrants closer examination by present-day theorists and researchers.

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Table 1

Chumship Check List

Below, you will find things that children your age sometimes do with their best friend. If you and your best friend do one of these things together, put a check in front of that number. You may check as many or as few of the things that you wish. Just make sure that you and your best friend do that thing together.

____1. Play games in which you both take turns being the leader.

____2. Walk to school together.

____3. Help out when one of you gets behind in his work.

____4. Talk about girls.

____5. Share each other's games, bat and ball, etc.

____6. Tell each other things you wouldn't tell anyone else.

____7. "Stick-up" for each other if an older boy is picking on one of you.

____8. Sit together on school bus.

____9. Try to be on same side when choosing teams for football or baseball, even if he is not the best player.

____10. Do "fun" things together, such as going to the movies or ball game.

____11. Tell each other if one of you has done something wrong.

____12. Phone each other about school assignments.

____13. Talk about what you want to be when you grow up.

____14. Sleep over at each other's house.

____15. Talk about your parents.

____16. Find it hard to disagree with him on important things.

____17. Go on a vacation or short trip with him and his family.

Table 2

Findings with Children's Self-Concept Scale

	Chumship Group	Non-chumship Group
Range	33-76	29-76
Stand. Dev.	8.11	11.05
Mean	61.1	53.3

Table 3

Summary of 1-Way ANOVA on Self-Concept

Source	SS	dF	Mean Square	F Ratio
bg	912.6	1	912.6	9.70**
wg	5457.0	58	94.09	
tot	6369.6	59		

**$p < .01$